

Attorneys for accused Columbia Park killer seek high court review

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The attorneys for Phiangchai Sisouvanh Synhavong want the Washington state Supreme Court to review a judge's finding that she is competent to stand trial in the death of a pregnant Pasco mother.

Dan Arnold and Michael Iaria contend their client suffers from mental illness and needs to be treated with appropriate medications before the Benton County murder case can proceed.

However, Superior Court Judge Robert Swisher has ruled that Sisouvanh Synhavong knew when it was appropriate to "slip into a delusional mode" and has appeared attentive and interactive with her attorneys at court hearings.

The defense filed the notice for discretionary review directly to the state's highest court, bypassing the Court of Appeals.

A Supreme Court commissioner is set to hear arguments July 29 from prosecutors and defense attorneys. The commissioner will then decide if the matter warrants consideration by the full court or if review should be denied.

Meanwhile, Sisouvanh Synhavong's case moves forward with the lawyers preparing for a Sept. 14 trial.

The 25-year-old Kennewick woman is charged with one count of first-degree murder for the 2008 death of Araceli Camacho Gomez. If convicted of fatally stabbing the 27-year-old mother, she will spend the rest of her life in prison.

Camacho Gomez was killed after meeting with Sisouvanh Synhavong to get baby clothes, according to prosecutors. The victim reportedly got into the back seat of her killer's car, only to be stabbed along the highway and her baby cut from her womb before being dumped in Kennewick's Columbia Park, Prosecutor Andy Miller has told the court.

Camacho Gomez was found dead early June 28, 2008.

Hours before, Sisouvanh Synhavong called 911 saying she had just given birth and "her baby was in distress." It was only at the hospital that authorities discovered she was not the baby's mother.

A Seattle psychiatrist hired by the defense testified before the court that Sisouvanh Synhavong suffers from dissociative disorder, delusional disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

A psychologist from Eastern State Hospital testified that Sisouvanh Synhavong was feigning symptoms. Sisouvanh Synhavong carried around a rolled up blanket she believed was her 21/2-year-old son while in the Medical Lake facility, but told jokes and played card games with other patients when she thought facility staff wasn't watching, the state psychologist said.

Swisher ruled April 20 that Sisouvanh Synhavong is competent. He questioned why defense lawyers waited nearly 11/2 years into the case to raise doubts about their client's ability to assist in the case because of mental health concerns.

Arnold said the defense wouldn't comment on their request before the Supreme Court.

Miller also said it's not appropriate to comment on the case.

Read more: <http://www.thenewtribune.com/2010/07/04/1251902/attorneys-for-accused-columbia.html#ixzz0swMBEq4L>